

Roads are designated as scenic byways because of their unique, intrinsic qualities. ...[to] invite the public to visit, experience, and appreciate... —Alan Yamada

Driving for pleasure has been ranked as one of the top five outdoor recreation activities for the past 20 years. The appeal of scenic roads is the intrinsic quality of Virginia's diverse landscapes and the ease of connecting with nature from the automobile. Traveling scenic byways provides an opportunity to have a relaxing, comfortable outdoor experience that nourishes the need for a connection with nature. In fact, the 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS) ranks driving for pleasure as the second most popular outdoor recreation activity with 54 percent of the respondents participating.

There are both national and state sponsored scenic roads programs. The Virginia Byways program in Virginia recognizes natural, cultural, historical, recreational and archeological amenities of the Commonwealth's scenic roads. In addition, the unique and varied culture and character of the geographic regions of the Commonwealth are represented by designated Virginia Byways.

Scenic Highway and Virginia Byway benefits

Scenic byways add economic benefits to the community. For example, the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the state's three All-American Roads, adds more than \$945 million annually to Virginia's economy. The Virginia Byway program also:

- Promotes adjacent communities and the scenic byway corridor by including designated road segments on the state map for *Scenic Roads of Virginia* as well as information included on the Virginia Byways web site.
- Creates an awareness of the unique qualities surrounding scenic byways.
- Recognizes the beauty of unique places and may offer special funding opportunities for scenic roads projects with clear planning objectives.
- Provides additional economic opportunities, including being part of the coordinated promotional strategy for Virginia tourism.



Fall along Virginia Byway Route 22 in Louisa County. Photo by VDOT.

- Affords localities the opportunity to participate in the National Scenic Byway Program.
- Insures environmental review consideration for all federal and state funded projects.
- Restricts placement of outdoor signage along Byways corridors.

Findings

- The 2006 VOS listed driving for pleasure as the second most popular outdoor recreation activity with 55.6 percent of Virginians participating.
- The 2006 VOS also identified visiting historic sites and visiting natural areas as important outdoor recreational pursuits with 56.1 percent and 44.3 percent, respectively, of Virginians participating.
- Scenic roads are key community assets, and communities are often interested in designation and promotion of these scenic resources.
- Increased development threatens the integrity of Virginia Byway corridors.
- The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is working with Virginia Tourism Corp. (VTC) and others to develop a scenic byways website to promote the program attractions and connect communities.
- For the first time in Virginia history, four roads were designated as National Scenic Byways: Blue Ridge Parkway, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Skyline Drive and Colonial Parkway.
- For the first time in Virginia history, three roads were designated as All-American Roads: Blue Ridge Parkway, George Washington Parkway and Colonial Parkway.

Recommendations

- Update Virginia Scenic Byway designation procedures and program in cooperation with Scenic Virginia, VDOT and others. Consider adding a historic or heritage category to the program.
- Establish a process for benchmarking byway corridors, which will result in a more unified acceptance or denial of corridors for designation.
- Track changes and provide a basis for technical assistance opportunities for corridor management through annual visual inspections of designated byways.

- The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) should incorporate Scenic Byway Corridors, existing and qualified, in the green infrastructure land planning effort, and management plans should be developed to support donation of conservation easements along designated byways.
- DCR, in partnership with VDOT and other agencies, should hold a workshop on scenic/aesthetics issues and develop a Scenic Byways Management Manual for localities.
- DCR and VDOT should assist local governments with the development of land use planning tools (i.e., overlay zones) along scenic highways and Virginia Byways to protect the attractive character of the scenic byways.
- Localities should partner with state, local and professional organizations to determine implementation strategies to protect the scenic assets of byway corridors.
- VTC and VDOT should continue to identify and employ funding opportunities for scenic byways promotion, corridor management plans, safety, maintenance and placement of visitor aids.
- The Commonwealth should establish a dedicated source of funds to maintain the integrity of Scenic Byways without using funds from other transportation programs.
- VDOT and the Commonwealth Transportation Board should implement the recommendations of the 1995 report to the General Assembly on "Road Design Standards in Scenic and Historic Areas."
- VDOT should incorporate accommodations to meet the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists when making improvements to designated scenic byways.
- DCR should continue to review and comment on permit applications to protect scenic roads and rivers, especially at bridge crossings and at major primary and interstate road crossings.
- DCR should partner with VTC, VDOT and others to promote and manage thematic driving trails.

Adventure beckons on the roads and highways designated as Virginia Byways. More than mere pavement between points A and B, a Virginia Byway offers travelers a side of the Commonwealth that is uncommon and enlightening. Each byway leads to scenes of natural beauty and places of historical and social significance.

(VDOT website, Virginia's Scenic Byways)

Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways

History of Virginia Byways

The Virginia Byways recognition program began in 1966, when the Virginia General Assembly passed the Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways Act (*Code of Virginia* §33.1-62). The Act authorizes the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to recognize roads for their outstanding features. Two legislated definitions apply to Virginia scenic roads designations. A Scenic Highway is a road designed and built within a protected corridor. While some roads in Virginia qualify as Scenic Highways, the more common designation is Virginia Byways. Virginia Byways are existing roads with significant aesthetic and cultural values that connect areas of historical, natural or recreational significance.

The Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways Act requires DCR, along with VDOT, to determine roads eligible for designation. Existing and potential Virginia Byways are shown on map _____. As of spring 2006, over 2,780 miles of roads have been designated Virginia Byways. In addition, four National Scenic Byways totaling approximately 369 miles and the three U.S. Forest Service (USFS) byways totaling about 96 miles have also been recognized in Virginia.

While the Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways Act was passed by the General Assembly in 1966, the first Virginia Byway was not designated until 1974. This designation occurred after VDOT surveyed the more than 52,000 highway miles throughout the Commonwealth to identify potential byways. The initial list of Virginia Byways recommended more than 1,600 road miles for designation. Of that original 1,600 road miles, all but 450 miles have been designated and are

included in the total 2,782 miles included in the Virginia Byways system. Recommendations for Virginia Byway designation are based on visual qualities, historic interest and recreational opportunities. Potential Virginia Byway designations are revised every five years and included in the *Virginia Outdoors Plan*.

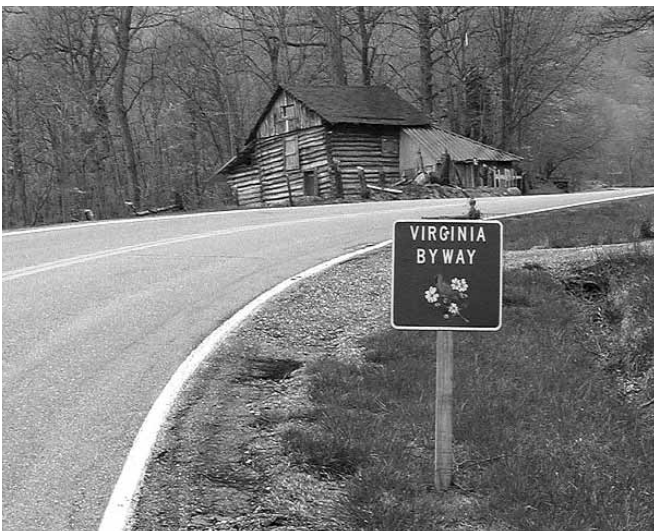
Many roads from the initial list of Virginia Byways have been designated; however, efforts are needed to geographically balance the distribution of Virginia Byways across the Commonwealth. Statewide interest in celebrating Jamestown 2007 has promoted a flurry of applications for Virginia Byway designation. Since June of 2005, over 700 miles of roads have been studied resulting in an additional 460 miles being recommended for Virginia Byway designation. Among the most notable designations are the four national parkways recognized in 2006 as National Scenic Byways. Three of these parkways were also designated All-American Roads.

Process for designation of Virginia Byways

Scenic quality is defined by the contribution of resources to the overall visual quality of the landscape. Elements of the landscape including landform, water, vegetation, community design and gray infrastructure influence scenic quality. Intrinsic qualities along Virginia Byways include cultural, historical and recreational features along the road corridor creating significant scenic views without interruption from detracting features. A byway's features must be representative of the intrinsic qualities, unique, irreplaceable or distinct characteristics of the area. A byway most often represents an exceptional example of a common regional landscape.

All Virginia Byways should share three characteristics of scenic quality:

- *Frequency* - Scenic features and views should be frequent enough to give a sense of continuity to the drive along the byway.
- *Consistency* - Along the road corridor, scenic features should consistently relate to each other as well as to cultural, historical and recreational attributes. A scenic road's relationship to the surrounding environment is important to the sense of cohesiveness and quality of the visual experience.
- *Variety* - A variety of viewing opportunities enhance the experience of a byway, including seasonal changes.



Peaks of Otter along Route 43 in Bedford County. Photo by VDOT.



Virginia Byway Route 39 in Alleghany County. Photo by VDOT.

The process of designating a road a Virginia Byway is initiated at the local level and generally follows the procedure outlined below.

1. A request for study is submitted by the locality to DCR or VDOT.
2. Land use, zoning information and historical documentation along the road corridor is submitted by the locality.
3. VDOT and DCR review traffic volumes and accident reports along the road corridor.
4. A field study is conducted by DCR and VDOT.
5. Field study results and preliminary recommendations are shared with the locality.
6. The locality holds a public hearing to receive input on supporting a local resolution for the Virginia Byway designation.
7. DCR and VDOT forward the recommendation and local resolution to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB).
8. The CTB approves the designation.
9. VDOT erects Virginia Byway signage along the corridor and adds the road segment to informational materials.

Re-evaluation of Virginia Byways

Since Virginia Byways is a recognition program, designation is only the first step in protecting the Virginia Byway corridors. Over time, land uses and scenic road corridors may change. These changes cause concern about the continued eligibility of Virginia

Byways to meet designation criteria. To assist with long-term tracking of the condition and scenic quality of Virginia Byways, VDOT district offices are responsible for conducting annual evaluations of all designated Virginia Byways.

In conjunction with VDOT, a cooperative initiative aimed at maintaining the integrity of the Virginia Byway program should be implemented throughout the Virginia Byways system to involve local governments, planning district commissions (PDCs), VTC and DCR. This cooperative initiative would establish scenic corridor baselines for Virginia Byways defining values and resources that determine the acceptance or denial for Virginia Byway designation. Local and regional land use and transportation plans would be referenced as part of the evaluation. This data and evaluation is key to maintaining the consistency of the program. Initial assessments could use car-mounted video cameras to document scenic and land use conditions. Follow-up recordings could be done every three to five years to provide comparative data and clearly articulate the unique characteristics of the corridor. Based on the baseline assessment and evaluations, recommendations for future additions or removals from the Virginia Byways system would be made and planning tools implemented for corridor protection.

Information about the Virginia Byways program and a statewide map may be referenced on the Virginia Byways website:
www.virginiadot.org/info/service/faq-byways.asp.

A Virginia map for touring Virginia's Byways may be ordered at
www.virginiadot.org/info/service/maporder.asp.

Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byways Program in Virginia:
www.byways.org/browse/states/VA

Other scenic roads

In addition to the Virginia Byways, there are other road designation programs including the National Park Service Parkways, the Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads Program, U.S. Forest Service byways, and the American Automobile Association program (see table VII-5).

Table VII-5 Scenic Roads Designations

Title	American Byways			Virginia Scenic Byways Program	National Forest Scenic Byways	American Automobile Assoc.
	National Scenic Byways Program	All-American Roads Program				
Mission/ Vision	Create a distinctive collection of roads, stories & treasured places; provide resources to the byway community to enhance local quality of life through efforts to preserve, protect, interpret, and promote the intrinsic qualities of designated byways.	Identify national scenic byways with multiple intrinsic qualities and that are destinations in and of themselves with exceptional traveling experiences to be had.		Identify road corridors containing aesthetic or cultural value near areas of historical, natural or recreational significance for designation. The program intent is to encourage travel throughout the state to interesting destinations and away from traffic corridors.	Officially designated byways represent the best of the 100,000 miles of roads running through US National Forests.	Identifies off the beaten driving pathways to interesting places and road corridors of scenic value.
Designation From	U.S. Secretary of Transportation	U.S. Secretary of Transportation		Commonwealth Transportation Board or General Assembly	U.S. Forest Service	AAA
Administrator	U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration	U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration		Dept. of Conservation & Recreation and Va Dept. of Transportation	U.S. Forest Service	AAA
Date Enacted	1991	1991		1966	1988	1988
# Byways; # miles in Virginia	99 byways; 110 mi. in Va. Skyline Drive	27 roads; 277 mi. in Va. - Blue Ridge, Colonial, George Washington		2782 miles of designated Va. Byways	100 byways, 5,157 miles; 100 mi. Va.- Big Walker Mt.; Highlands, Mt Rogers	650 roads; 983 mi. for 15 in Va.; some highways & w/ other designations
Criteria for Designation	A road is to be of regional significance, and have 1 intrinsic quality that is distinct and represents the region. The 6 intrinsic qualities are: Archeological, Cultural, Historic, Natural, Recreational and Scenic.	It must have at least 2 intrinsic qualities, be a 'destination unto itself' and it must provide an exceptional traveling experience. Which is defined as one that driving the road is the primary reason for their trip.		It has important scenic values & a diversity experiences; links together & provides access to scenic, historical, recreational, cultural, natural and archeological elements; bypasses large roads; could have management along the route; safety features can be added to improve motorist experience; and local governments support the designation.		A road can meet any of the 5 Classification: Traditional- that best represents the state, Cultural Heritage, Historic, natural beauty, and Classic/ Premier Drives that are derived from all of the classifications.
Impacts/ Restrictions	Must have a corridor management plan; no new outdoor advertising	Must have a corridor management plan; no new outdoor advertising		The only limitations could be the construction of new outdoor advertising signage.	Only those imposed by the forest service general management plan	None
Manager of Corridor	Localities or property owner, ie. USFS or NPS	Localities or property owner, ie. USFS or NPS		Localities	USFS	USFS, NPS, Localities depending
How to Add	Submissions are semi- annually as stated by FHWA & are complete digital reports.	During the selected time annually stated by FHWA a complete written and digital report.		Request from locality & completed report recommending designation by DCR		Added through Road Reporters Program of AAA
More Information	http://www.bywayonline.org/	http://www.bywayonline.org/		http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/info/service/faq-byways.asp	http://www.roadnotes.com/scenicdrives/va.htm	Call Local AAA Office

National Park Service Parkways are managed as scenic routes, emphasizing scenic values, recreational features, wildlife viewing, cultural and historical features with scenic overlooks, waysides and interpretive sites. NPS works with adjacent property owners and localities to preserve and protect the views, vistas and environment along its roads.

The National Scenic Byways Program

(www.byways.org/learn) is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. The program is a grassroots collaborative effort established in 1991 to help recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. The U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as All-American Roads or National Scenic Byways based on one or more archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities. Both designations involve lengthy processes and require corridor management plans.

- **National Scenic Byways** include the Skyline Drive, Blue Ridge Parkway and George Washington Memorial Parkway. Colonial Parkway also received this designation in 2005.
- **All-American Roads** designated in Virginia in 2005 include the Blue Ridge Parkway, Colonial Parkway and George Washington Parkway.

Intrinsic qualities of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads

To be designated a National Scenic Byway, a road must possess characteristics of regional significance within at least one of the following intrinsic qualities. All-American Roads must possess characteristics of national significance in at least two of the following intrinsic qualities.

Archaeological

Archaeological quality involves those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activity that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor's archeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains and other physical evidence have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past.

Cultural

Cultural quality is evidence and an expression of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features including, but not limited to, crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special

events and vernacular architecture are currently practiced. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities or ethnic traditions.

Historic

Historic quality encompasses legacies of the past that are distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or manmade, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past. Historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and association.

Natural

Natural quality applies to those features in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landforms, water bodies, vegetation and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity, but the natural features reveal minimal disturbances.

Recreational

Recreational quality involves outdoor recreational activities directly associated with and dependent upon the natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape. Recreational activities provide opportunities for active and passive recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to, downhill skiing, rafting, boating, fishing and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be recognized.

Scenic

Scenic quality is the heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements in the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience. All elements of the landscape—landform, water, vegetation and man-made development—contribute to the quality of the corridor's visual environment. Everything present is in harmony and shares in the intrinsic qualities.

Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways

U.S. Forest Service byways

The National Forest Service (USFS) began designating significant roads within forest boundaries in 1988. These roads are notably scenic and provide opportunities to experience nature first hand in the national forests. Three USFS byways traversing a portion of the USFS land in Virginia are also designated as Virginia Byways: Big Walker, Mount Rogers and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Highlands Scenic Byway is another USFS scenic road designation, but it is unpaved and does not qualify for designation under the Virginia Program.

U.S. Forest Service Byways in Virginia

Big Walker Mountain Scenic Byway

An alternative to six miles of Interstate 77 and the Big Walker Interstate tunnel, the Big Walker Mountain Scenic Byway traverses 16.2 miles of State Highway 717 and US 52/21 in the Jefferson National Forest.

Highlands Scenic Byway

This National Forest Scenic Byway weaves through a landscape of diverse vegetation, scenic views, unique geological formations and an abundance of wildlife. In addition, there are numerous historic places, including the remnants of a once-thriving mining community.

Mount Rogers Scenic Byway

The Mount Rogers Scenic Byway traverses approximately 60 miles of the Jefferson National Forest and offers scenic views of mountains and rural America.

American Automobile Association

The American Automobile Association (AAA) program introduces travelers to Virginia's scenic amenities. This program has been in existence since 1988 and emphasizes directing travelers to little-known interesting places. Under the AAA program, there are five classifications of roads. These include Traditional roads that best represent the state, Cultural Heritage, Historic, Natural Beauty, and Classic roads, which are premier drives derived from all of the classifications. Virginia is host to 15 AAA roads. Some AAA designated roads include interstates that traverse through scenic areas lightly developed of the state, like U.S. Interstate 81.

Thematic driving trails

Thematic driving trails are growing in popularity and many more are being recognized and promoted for tourism. Most of Virginia's thematic trails help tell historical stories that crisscross the state tying small and large communities together through the experience of past events. Growing popularity for thematic trails inclusive of Virginia Byways may present opportunities for partnerships with DCR, VTC, VDOT and other organizations for promotion and management of these corridors.

A new and exciting effort is exemplified in the Journey Through Hallowed Ground (JTHG) partnership. The JTHG is a four-state, nonprofit, organization dedicated to raising regional, national and international awareness of the historic, cultural and natural resources in the region, which generally follows the Old Carolina Road (Routes 15 and 231) from Gettysburg, through Maryland, to Monticello in Albemarle County. Formed originally as a partnership between the National Park Service, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, local, regional and national grassroots organizations, this partnership has the support of nearly every governmental body within the corridor. JTHG works to create educational leadership programs to increase civic engagement for students of every age and by creating heritage programs for every citizen within, and visitor to, the region.



*Spring on the George Washington Parkway, an All American Road.
Photo by National Scenic Byways Program.*

Thematic Driving Trails

- Civil Rights In Education Heritage Trail - www.varetreat.com
- Civil War Trails (10+ tours) - 1-888-CIVIL WAR, www.civilwar-va.com/virginia or www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-civil-war.asp
- Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trails - www.dgif.virginia.gov
- Journey Through Hallowed Ground - www.HallowedGround.org
- Crooked Road Music Trail - www.thecrookedroad.org
- Captain John Smith James River Trail - www.JohnSmithTrail.org
- Regional driving tours - www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=182
 - Blue Ridge Highlands — Music, Crafts and Mountain Memories!
 - Central Virginia — An African-American Heritage Tour
 - Chesapeake Bay — A Water-Lover's Dream
 - Eastern Shore — Birdwatchers' Paradise
 - Hampton Roads — Driving Tour Through Military History
 - Heart of Appalachia — Daniel Boone Territory
 - Northern Virginia — The World War II Heritage Trail
 - Shenandoah Valley — Southern Driving Tour Through History and Culture
- Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail - www.danielboonetrail.com
- George Washington - www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=200
- World War II - www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=181
- African-American Heritage - www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=196
- Alleghany Highlands - www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-alleghany-highlands.asp
- Capital Country - www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-cap-sites.asp
- Virginia's Millennium Legacy Trails - www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-legacy.asp
- Northern Virginia - www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-nova-sites.asp
- Southern Highlands - www.virginiadot.org/programs/prog-byways-so-highlands.asp

As more emphasis is put on traveling and tourism, it becomes increasingly important to protect the resources that provide pleasurable, scenic experiences for travelers. The challenge for scenic byways corridors is to integrate community development and growth into the protection of the scenic integrity of designated and potential byway corridors throughout the Commonwealth.

Selected References

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America's Byways Resource Center. *Conserving Our Treasured Places: Managing Visual Quality on Scenic Byways*. Scenic America.

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Virginia Department of Transportation. Virginia's Scenic Byways. www.vdot.virginia.gov/infoservice/faq-byways.asp.